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## PROHIBITION AS A PRESENT POLITICAL PLATFORM

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Any question to be of such importance as to be made the basis of a political platform must measure up to four tests. (1) It must concern the purpose of the government—the life, liberty and happiness of the people, the establishment of justice, the general welfare, the common defense, the blessings of liberty, or some similar governmental purpose; (2) it must be of such magnitude as to be of real importance; (3) it must be unsettled; (4) it must be capable of settlement.

Questions measuring to but one or two of these tests may properly be in a platform, but may not properly be its basis. The center beam of a real political platform will be found to always measure up fully to the four tests. Take a living and hence dangerous illustration—the tariff. It has been the center plank of more political platforms than all other questions in American politics. Around it have been waged the battles of the past with valor and zeal. Platform builders have laid it as the main stay of their structures, and the level and plummet have tried every other plank to it, but not a platform architect would now dare to line to it, and both of the parties which have been accustomed to forget all else would now gladly forget it.

The reason that the formerly great platform timber has become a cumbrance in the political lumber yard is not hard to find. It concerns to no small degree the purposes of government. Check 1. It is of sufficient magnitude to challenge commercial attention. Check 2. It is unsettled. Check 3. But it cannot be settled. It fails at 4.

We have tried to settle it, but failed. Our fathers tried, but failed. Their fathers tried, but failed. Were commercial conditions (with which tariff deals) static, a shrewd mathematical statesman could settle the question, and an intelligent political party could

adopt his settlement as the basis of a platform, and, when in power, enact the settlement into the law-books and then look for new worlds to conquer. But commercial conditions change, hence the tariff fails to measure to the fourth requisite, and it is an administrative and not a political problem.

Take a dead illustration—the slavery question. Apply the measure of every test to it, and it bulks full—it concerned the life, liberty, and happiness of the people. Check 1. It was of mighty commercial, political and social import. Check 2. It was unsettled. Check 3. It was capable of settlement. Check 4. All of which leads to the general observation that most commercial questions are not true political questions because based upon principles which change with changing commercial conditions; hence, commercial questions rarely merit other than subordinate positions in political platforms. Per contra, moral questions which measure to the tests for platform timber, being based on the changeless principles of moral rectitude should and by the voice of history do form the basis of platforms in the real political contests. And no intelligent reader will be long misled by the prominence of candidates, frequency or noise of brass bands, or other ocular or auricular evidences as to the real issues of a campaign. A political issue is vital. The campaign torch-light procession is not. A “wake” makes a mighty demonstration, but its basis is a corpse. So with many a campaign.

Prohibition is the only present issue that measures to the four tests of basic platform material. It is vitally and inseparably related to the fundamental purposes of government. No issue, present or past, has so concerned the God-given rights of life, liberty and happiness, to insure which governments are established among men.

As to life, in its coarse, corporeal, material sense—the liquor traffic out-butcherers Gettysburg every six weeks. As to life in its somewhat elevated sense—comfort, contentment, hope, cheer; the contrast broadens by ten diameters. As to life in its best sense, moral, spiritual, vital, life; a hundred Gettysburgs could not work devastation so damnable as a single night of debauchery. There were 4,000,000 blacks who bore the relatively gentle bondage of bodily slavery. There are probably not less than two and a half times as many who are under the unspeakable inward bondage of habit. That which is imposed upon a man from the outside is

nothing. Death, the Leveler, will come soon at longest and whether good or bad will free him of it. That which is of the life, not merely on the life, is beyond the touch of Death. So when Lincoln compared the slavery of drink to the slavery of shackles he rightly said:

Herein shall we have a viler slavery manumitted, greater tyrant deposed; in it more of want supplied, more of disease healed, more sorrow assuaged. By it no orphans starving, no widows weeping.

And happiness—no time need be wasted to show how this sweet purpose of government is turned to gall and wormwood and ashes by drink. Therefore, prohibition, as a present political issue, does vitally concern the basic principles of government. Check 1. It is a mighty problem, mightiest in the sense shown in the preceding paragraph. Yet, financially, commercially, economically (all bearing the \$) it over-tops the most colossal of problems. Financially it represents a direct and indirect annual outlay of more than the total national debt at the close of the war. The direct and indirect cost of alcoholic liquor for twelve months would lay a pavement of silver dollars twelve inches wide and reaching from Hell Gate, N. Y., to the Golden Gate, in San Francisco. With the money we could buy our annual product of wheat, potatoes, barley, rye, gold, silver and precious stones, and have enough residue to pay all of the dividends of all of the railroads, on all of the stock of the national banks, and the entire expense of our public school system and the pensions of old soldiers. And economically that money is worse than wasted. "No," says some one. "It makes an outlet for barley and hops and corn." But the man who would buy brick and mortar and labor to build a dam to flood and destroy a city would worse than waste the money paid for the material and labor though he would make an outlet for brick and mortar, and employ a horde of toilers. Commercially it is a dead weight. It destroys ambition and ability, and that destroys productivity, and without productivity there is no healthy commerce—in the last analysis, no commerce. I eschew argument to illustrate. On the banks of the Red River of the North are ten cities, five in prohibition North Dakota, and five in license Minnesota. Towns thrive on commerce and die without it. Every prohibition city gained more population during the ten years of the last census than

its license sister has accumulated during its entire existence, and Grand Forks gained more than three times the total population of East Grand Forks, just across the creek. The prohibition issue is a mighty issue. Check 2.

It is unsettled. On this I venture to be dogmatic! Check 3.

It is capable of settlement. Up to this time it has remained unsettled in the face of many attempts of honest and capable people to solve it, and this was probably inevitable. Edmund Burke said, with a possible touch of cynicism, "The people never do a thing right till they have tried every possible way of doing it wrong." Yet he shot not far wide of the truth. We have tried to settle the question by enacting that a saloon shall have no chairs, screens, games or music,—though no one holds that it is sitting on chairs, or hiding behind screens, or playing checkers, or listening to music that sends the saloon habitue home to chase his children with the boot-jack, or brain his wife with a rolling-pin, or shoot the stars out of the sky, or the life out of his neighbors. It is not the chairs nor the screens nor the games nor the music that play havoc with humanity—it is the booze.

We have had a singular fascination for every measure and method for stopping the traffic that the ingenuity of the mind could devise, except to stop it. The bill of particulars would be tedious. Let us consider the two great prohibition waves, and the one that is now sweeping toward high tide. The first came in the fifties. Its plan was to elect temperance men to the legislature, regardless of party affiliation or policy. It was the first crude attempt of the temperance people in politics, and was so specious, plausible and easy that everybody interested lent a willing hand, and sixteen states swung majestically into the dry column at the hands of Whig, Democratic, American and other temperance legislators. The laws thus enacted fell into the hands of Whig, Democratic, American and other party sheriffs, constables, mayors and prosecutors. The various parties by whom these officers were elected were either hostile or indifferent to prohibition. The infant law was cussed and cuffed and kicked by men who were good enough in general, but as touching the law were wholly bad. The policy fell into disrepute for want of a political sponsor who wished the law to succeed. Its open and protected violation drove even the better element to seek its repeal.

That every one of the sixteen states staggered back into the liquor column ought to be conclusive evidence of the failure of the policy of enacting a law radically opposed by the parties in power and turning its enforcement over to officers elected by those parties. Statesmen have never sought to settle even relatively small political problems by such methods.

The second mighty wave swept over the nation thirty years later. It sought to rectify the former error by engrafting the prohibitory laws into the constitution where they would be safe from the whims of the legislature. John B. Finch, chairman of the Prohibition party, Frances E. Willard, president of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and nearly all leading opponents of the traffic united to bring about this "solution." It was a mighty battle—"The People *vs.* The Liquor Traffic" was the slogan, but the real, though unrealized, fight was "The People *vs.* The Political Parties."

It was with the utmost difficulty, after begging and bullying, pleading and pounding, that the legislatures would submit the question to the vote of the people. Then, when submitted, the leading party politicians, like Wm. J. Bryan of Nebraska, A. B. Cummins of Iowa, and John J. Ingalls of Kansas, would take the stump against it. If it was adopted some scheme to thwart the will of the people would be devised. *Vide* Iowa, whose 30,000 prohibition majority was nullified; Ohio whose 82,000 prohibition majority was ignored, by the treasonable chicanery of the hostile political leaders. Even when the amendment was graciously allowed to become operative, the recreant officials made the law a hissing, a reproach and a by-word in large areas of the states. So again the "settlement" that put the law into the hands of its political enemies and assassins failed to settle.

How, then, could the question be settled. Why not try to settle it the way we settle other political questions? Great problems are solved by framing them into the dominant plank of political platforms, and appealing to the people for their solution at the hands of a political party committed to the execution of the proposed policies on those questions. In other words, the liquor question will be solved when a clear cut and correct policy for its solution is engrafted into a party platform, when that party is elected a power, the law in harmony with the policy is enacted into statute, and the

statute is committed to the hands of sheriffs, constables, mayors, marshals, prosecutors and policemen, all of whom are in harmony with and elected by a political party committed to the policy.

The prohibition issue as a political platform demands the prohibition of the manufacture, sale, importation and transportation of alcoholic liquors for beverage purposes. No one doubts that if the manufacture and transportation is effectively prohibited its sale will stop, even if there were no law prohibiting it, because men never sell that which they cannot get to sell.

There are approximately 2,000 distilleries manufacturing distilled liquors. The government holds the key to every such distillery. There are about the same number of breweries, every one of them under close government inspection. To stop the sale may be a difficult thing so long as the manufacture continues, because it can be sold in secret from jugs, bottles, hollow canes, plug hats, boot legs, tin bustles and hundreds of other ingenious devices, but it cannot be made in a jug or a plug hat or a hollow cane or a tin bustle. It takes a brewery or distillery with tall smoke stacks, acres of floor space, vast tanks and machinery and coal pits, and other paraphernalia, making secrecy impossible, except for the production in such small quantities as to be politically, economically and socially negligible. Therefore, the question is capable of solution. Check 4.

The liquor problem, therefore, looms on the civic horizon not only as a present political platform, but as the only political platform; and it may be safely predicted that the tally sheets at the coming election will challenge the attention of the American electorate to the impending importance of the problem, and push the hands on the dial of progress toward the solution of a question that has been vexatious, chiefly because its solution has been avoided, and its importance scoffed by the men who, on account of their native ability, we have been accustomed to look upon as leading statesmen.